

# Journey Through Life



**Dallas Burdette: January 3, 1998**

**Thrust statement:** We have embarked upon a momentous expedition -- traveling a road on which the Lord has set us in His purpose.

**Scripture Reading:** Deuteronomy 30:19

Do you ever stop and think about your life as a journey? Are you conscious that you are on a journey now? You have either chosen to take the broad way that leads to eternal damnation or you have chosen the narrow way that leads to eternal life. I ask you today to decide which road you are on. Everyone is on a pilgrimage through life. If we are Christians, then, we are no longer enslaved and captive to sin but are on our final destination of eternal salvation. Since this is so, I encourage you to renew your commitment to the new life in Jesus Christ. Whether you are Christian or sinner, I appeal to you to make a resolution to serve the living God with all your heart, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

As we begin a New Year, I implore you to meditate upon the words of Joshua as he approaches the end of his life.

"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. **But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD"** (Joshua 24:14-15).

This sermon emphasizes the exercises of the will, the heart, and the mind, which things are necessary for the Christian to appropriate the redemption given to us in our Lord. This exhortation wrestles with one of the most troublesome theological difficulties of the Christian faith: the relationship of our works, as men and women already redeemed by the cross and resurrection, to our salvation. Do we still have something to do? Can Christians accept or reject God's grace through their life style? Can one's continuing unfaithfulness and disobedience cancel one's salvation?

Whatever answer you give, that answer must be measured by the teaching of God's Word. There is much in the New Testament that leads one to believe that the benefits of salvation in Christ can be lost. For instance, Paul addresses the Galatians with these stern words: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (**Galatians 5:4**). Holy Scripture abounds with exhortations to faithfulness. Paul charged Timothy:

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses (**1 Timothy 6:11-12**).

Many Christians rely on what Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." It is not uncommon for Christians to relish in the benefits of redemption made available by God through Jesus Christ, without responding to God's grace through good works – the number is legion. Our indifference becomes apparent when we assure ourselves that God accepts us even when we disregard His Gospel and His teachings, or when we assume that we can love God and at the same time hate our brother or spouse or acquaintance with impunity. Apparently this attitude existed in Paul's day also. He left Titus on the island of Crete so that he might "straighten out what was left unfinished" (**Titus 1:5**). In this epistle to Titus, Paul deals with proper conduct for Christians, those who had been saved by God's grace. Paul grounds right conduct upon what God has done for us through Jesus. He writes:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you (**Titus 2:11-15**).

This sermon proclaims that there is a response that must be made to God's mercy. We must never forget that God is working in us, in spite of all the trials and tribulations that we undergo. For instance, while Paul languished in a Roman jail, he, nevertheless, could write the Philippians that

As you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing (**Philippians 2:12-16**).

Let us return to the Scripture reading in the beginning of our message. You recall that Moses admonished the Israelites to respond to the blessings of God. When Moses made his final appeal, he was one hundred and twenty years old. He offered them life or death. He vigorously pleaded with them,

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (**Deuteronomy 30:15-20**).

Israel had reached her destination at a moment in time between bondage and a future fruitful life. She had now moved in a direction in her pilgrimage away from enslavement toward her salvation. To some extent, this is also a description of our own day to day lives. At times our lives can seem pointless, unimportant, and insignificant – as if our lives are measured out in "coffee spoons at home, or in production figures at the office." But the truth of the matter is that we have embarked upon a momentous expedition, traveling a road on which the Lord God has set us in His purpose. And we got started on this journey by being rescued out of slavery through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Prior to our conversion, we were enslaved to the power of death. And, try as we will to escape its clutches, we never can outrun its grasp or loose its cold fingers from encircling our lives and the lives of all whom we love. All one has to do is just walk to the cemetery to visit the graves of those who have preceded them in death. Death still hangs over the human race like some great phantom from the beginning of our first disobedience. The words of the Hebrew writer still ring in our ears: "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (**Hebrew 9:27**). We never can escape the fangs of death, but God accomplished this feat for us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On that Easter morning, as we sometimes refer to the resurrection, death's tyranny was broken. There, in the resurrection, human flesh and blood was delivered from the grave's captivity and death lost its power to claim humanity as slaves. This wonderful news of victory over death is what caused Paul to shout:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 15:54-57**).

A new power invaded history – God became flesh. John, the apostle, speaks of this manifestation in glowing terms: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (**John 1:14**). This One who came from the Father was "full of grace and truth." Jesus reveals to Nicodemus that

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (**John 3:16-21**).

On another occasion Jesus responded to the Jews who tried to kill Him: "just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it" (**John 5:21**). To these same Jews, He also said, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned" (**John 5:28-29**). God has come intruding into our own personal lives, through Jesus Christ, changing our state of affairs. He retrieved us. He sanctified us. He purchased us back. In Christ our Lord, He claimed us as His own. And so the road we travel is now His road, leading from redemption toward the future. This is the reason that Paul could write: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). Paul says it is because of Him that men can boast, not because of our works. "This righteousness" writes Paul, "from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (**Romans 3:22**).

We as Christians often deceive ourselves into thinking that because Christ died and rose from the dead that we have nothing else to do. We, for some reason, think that we will simply drift into the benefits of our salvation. But a word of caution is pertinent here in our journey. Jesus encouraged His disciples to "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (**Matthew 7:13-14**). What does "only a few find it" mean to you? Having been redeemed by the cross and the empty tomb, we can still fail to realize the full benefits of our redemption.

Can you imagine the benefits to our society if Christians were clothed with the "fruit of the Spirit"? What are they? Paul enumerates them as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**). Paul also reminds those in Corinth to live godly lives. He, through the Holy Spirit, captures the mind of God in His demands upon the redeemed.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.** For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 5:17—6:2).

We live in an age and a society where anything goes. If it feels good do it. But this is not God's way. God says, "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:2). Since we are dead to sin, then, Paul exhorts,

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:12-14).

## Conclusion

In concluding our sermon -- Journey Through Life -- I encourage each of you to begin to love once more as God loves you. We need to forgive others as God has forgiven us through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. In this journey, we are to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7). To love Him means to wipe out the evil past in our closeness with those around us – the past bitterness you have against your spouse, the past falling-out you have against a relative, the past altercation you had with a friend that has shattered the togetherness between you. To love God means to love those whom God loves. To love God means to care for those whom God cares. There are a lot of people in the world who irritate our sensibilities. There are people who are totally obnoxious to us. Since we have embarked upon a momentous expedition, traveling a road on which the Lord has set us in His purpose, then, I encourage you to reflect time and again upon the words of Isaiah:

And a highway will be there;  
it will be called the Way of Holiness.  
The unclean will not journey on it;  
it will be for those who walk in that Way;  
wicked fools will not go about on it (Isaiah 35:8).

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**Preached:**

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